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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANJUL 000691

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SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: MORE ON CABINET RESHUFFLE

REF: A) BANJUL 652 B) BANJUL 588 ET AL C) BANJUL 668

(ALL NOTAL)

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH STAFFORD, REASON 1.4 (B AND D)

SUMMARY

11. (C) Following the appointment of Secretaries of State (ministers) for Foreign Affairs, Trade, Industry and Employment, and Tourism and Culture, the GOTG cabinet reshuffle initiated October 18-19 is now virtually complete; only the post of Attorney General and Secretary of State for Justice remains to be filled. With only three new faces in the 18-member cabinet and no expectation of any significant policy changes, our contacts have given a ho-hum reaction to the reshuffle. However, the reshuffle did serve to underscore Jammeh,s confidence in various long-serving members, such as Vice President Isatou Njie Saidy. The new Foreign Affairs Secretary of State, Bala Garba Jahumpa, is likely to be a

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weak performer, like his predecessor. Perhaps most noteworthy about the reshuffle is the departure of two persons considered close to Jammeh, former Secretary General Mambury Njie and former Trade, Industry and Employment Secretary of State Alieu Ngum. Few sources regret the departure of Sheikh Tijan Hydara as Attorney General and Justice Secretary of State, but we are told that Jammeh is having difficulty in finding a successor. A major constraint on the cabinet,s institutional role in policy-making is President Jammeh,s insistence at being personally at the center of decision-making, including on relatively minor matters. END SUMMARY.

OVERVIEW

12. (U) Ref A reported President Yahya Jammeh,s October 18-19 cabinet reshuffle, with the large majority of members staying on, either in their previous positions or assuming new portfolios. (NOTE: the 18-member cabinet consists of the President, Vice President, Secretary General, and 16 Secretaries of State, i.e. Ministers. The President appoints

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all other cabinet members, including the Vice President. Jammeh currently handles personally the portfolios for Defense, Energy, and, following the reshuffle, that of Works, Construction, and Infrastructure. The Vice President, Isatou Njie Saidy, also handles the Women,s Affairs portfolio. END NOTE.)

13. (U) Following the initial reshuffle, Jammeh made the following additional appointments:

-- Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs: Bala Garba Jahumpa, replacing the briefly-serving Maba Jobe, whose October 19 appointment was rescinded;

-- Secretary of State for Trade, Industry, and Employment: Susan Waffa-Ogoo;

-- Secretary of Tourism and Culture: Angela Cooley.

Both Jahumpa and Waffa-Ogoo served in the outgoing cabinet, holding the Works, Construction, and Infrastructure and Tourism and Culture portfolios, respectively. One cabinet slot remains vacant, that of Attorney General and Secretary of State for Justice. (COMMENT: The outgoing Foreign Affairs Secretary of State, Lamin Kaba Bajo, was among the cabinet's weaker performers, and his successor, Bala Garba Jahumpa, known as a pro-Jammeh diehard, is not likely to be much of an improvement. END COMMENT.)

HO-HUM REACTION TO THE RESHUFFLE

14. (C) Following Jammeh's re-election in the September 22 balloting (ref b), he had been widely expected to reshuffle the cabinet in order to show that he remains in charge, according to a well-informed journalist. However, our contacts have expressed surprise that Jammeh acted so quickly, prior to his formal inauguration in December. In any event, our sources have reacted in ho-hum fashion to the reshuffle, ruling out any significant changes in GOTG policies. They also note that the new cabinet includes only three newcomers, Ya-Elli Harding (Secretary General), Angela Cooley (Tourism and Culture) and Kanja Sanneh (Agriculture). (COMMENT: Harding is a well-established senior official, having previously served as aide to the Secretary General in the capacity of Secretary to the Cabinet. Both Cooley and Sanneh are unknown to us, although the latter at least, receives high marks for his previous service at the National Agriculture Research Institute see ref A. As for Colley, she

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has previously served as a school administrator and teacher, with no discernible background in the tourism or cultural affairs sectors. END COMMENT.)

JAMMEH,S INNER CIRCLE

15. (C) Despite the ho-hum reactions, the reshuffle served to underscore Jammeh's confidence in various of the longer-serving cabinet members, led by Vice President Njie-Saidy, originally appointed following Jammeh's initial election in 1996. While not generally regarded as among the more influential cabinet members, she plays a vital role; in contrast to the irascible, rough-hewn Jammeh, she is well-educated and polished and thus equipped to serve as the smiling face of the Government, in the words of a knowledgeable source. Two other cabinet members have served even longer than the Vice President, Susan Waffa-Ogoo (Trade, Industry, and Employment) and Edward Singhateh (Forestry and Environment). Both have served continuously in the cabinet since Jammeh's accession to power via coup in 1994; Singhateh, as a young military officer like Jammeh, was a leading figure in the coup. As for Waffa-Ogoo, she grew up in the same household as Jammeh and established herself over the years as a key confidant of Jammeh. Over the past year, there have been reports of the pair losing influence with Jammeh, but their retention in the cabinet suggests his continued reliance on them as advisers.

16. (C) A third veteran cabinet member is Yankouba Touray, who, like Singhateh, played a major role in Jammeh's successful overthrow attempt in 1994. Touray's cabinet

career has been somewhat checkered; although serving for long periods in various cabinet positions following the coup, his involvement in corruption led to his ouster from the cabinet in fall 2003; he did not return until 2005, as Secretary of State for Agriculture. Noted for his political skills, Touray, a senior official in the ruling APRC party, was prominent figure in Jammeh,s re-election campaign. (COMMENT:

Sources claim that Jammeh decided to return Touray to the cabinet in order to give him a platform for his campaigning in rural areas on behalf of Jammeh,s re-election bid. END COMMENT.) A fourth cabinet member of note is Finance and Economic Affairs Secretary of State Mousa Bala Gaye. Although Bala Gaye is a relative newcomer to the cabinet (first appointed in 2003), he has established himself as among its strongest performers. He is given considerable credit for the GOTG,s improved economic performance and, in particular, its progress in getting back on track with the IMF following a rupture in 2003 over irregularities at the Central Bank and other economic missteps by the GOTG. (COMMENT: Indicative of that progress, per ref C, an IMF delegation is currently here to negotiate a new PRGF for The Gambia. END COMMENT.)

NOTEWORTHY DEPARTURES

17. (C) Perhaps most noteworthy about the reshuffle is the departure of two others considered close to Jammeh -- Mambury Njie and Alieu Ngum, removed from the Secretary General and Trade, Industry, and Development slots, respectively. As Secretary General, Njie was, in effect, the President,s senior adviser and had a lengthy record of service in senior GOTG ranks. He previously served, inter alia, as Permanent Secretary at the Presidency, under the Secretary General,s supervision. In our regular contacts

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with Njie, he had struck us as an able and efficient adviser to Jammeh, well aware of the latter,s mercurial, impulsive tendencies and working, with occasional success, to soften them. In past months, Njie had frequently been out of the office due to ill health, and our sources believe that his absences had reached the point that Jammeh had decided to replace him. His successor and former aide, Ya-Elli Harding, is reputedly knowledgeable, but is known for her extreme discretion and retiring manner; her clout with Jammeh is likely to be less than Njie,s. As for Ngum, he had also previously served as Secretary General as well as in various diplomatic positions including that of Ambassador to the EU in Brussels. Our contacts are at a loss to explain his departure, and some speculate that he will be offered an Ambassadorship.

THE JUSTICE PORTFOLIO

18. (C) Few contacts regret the departure of Sheikh Tijan Hydera as Attorney General and Secretary of State for Justice. He was generally reckoned among the weakest performers in the cabinet and had been previously appointed to, and sacked from this portfolio. In our discussions with

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him, we found him poorly informed, vague about his priorities, and unwilling to acknowledge or address the GOTG,s deteriorating human rights performance over the past year. According to our sources, the delay in naming Hydera,s replacement is due to Jammeh,s difficulty in finding a candidate. We are told that many respected legal figures do not want the job, as they are aware of the frequent turnover; Hydera is reckoned to be the tenth person to occupy the position in as many years. We picked up a report that Jammeh approached Hydera,s well-regarded predecessor, veteran Justice Department official Raymond Sock, but that he declined to return to the position for health reasons.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATION: JAMMEH,S DOMINANT ROLE

19. (C) This latest cabinet reshuffle underscore Jammeh,s penchant for frequently replacing senior officials, and often, as in this case, no reason is given for the personnel changes. In any event, Jammeh,s insistence at being always at the center of the GOTG,s decision-making process including on matters (e.g., minor appointments) that one would expect to be handled at lower levels is a major constraint on the cabinet,s institutional role in that process. Our sense is that even the longest-serving cabinet members are cautious in asserting themselves in cabinet meetings and that all recognize that their primary duty is not to participate in the formulation of policies, but to implement Jammeh,s decisions.

STAFFORD